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ABSTRACT

Research on second language acquisition (SLA) and research on foreign language learning (FLL), often regarded as different and separate fields of inquiry, are compared in a brief review of literature. Perceptions about the scopes and characteristics of the research are examined. Concerns about the relationship between SLA research and theory and other fields of language study are also noted. The review is presented as the introduction to a group of four papers presented at a conference on the topic of this relationship, held at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (April 3-4, 1987), and focuses on the questions addressed by two of the papers: "What is FLL Research?" (Claire J. Kramsch) and "Theory and Research in SLA and FLL: On Producers and Consumers" (Bill VanPatten). The other papers are: "In Second Language Acquisition/Foreign Language Learning, Nothing Is More Practical than a Good Theory" (Sandra J. Savignon) and "Models, Processes, Principles, and Strategies: Second Language Acquisition In and Out of the Classroom" (Roger W. Anderson). Each of the papers is briefly summarized and all are recommended as points of departure for further analysis and discussion. (MSE)

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IDEAL 3, 1988

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Bill VanPatten James F. Lee

Second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language learning (FLL) have been and continue to be viewed by many as largely unrelated fields of research or at best being only weakly connected. Over ten years ago, Frechette (1976) noted that,

> By and large, observation of classroom practices and talks with classroom teachers have revealed that many feel a large portion of [second language acquisition research] efforts are of little relevance to them... (p. 377).

While it is undeniable that early psycholinguistic research in SLA which concentrated on morpheme studies and error analysis of the speech of learners of English was limited in scope, is it true some twelve years later that SLA research offers little to those in FLL? As recently as 1985, Higgs voiced a concern similar to Frechette's observation:

> One final point is that the majority of the research literature cited in support of the claims for the Input Hypothesis [e.g. Krashen 1982] assumes a second language or an immersion environment, not a foreign language situation...Offering this same literature in support of a foreign language pedagogy extrapolates what is arguably true for one kind of environment into a very different environment, with few experimental data... (p. 202).

This perception implies that the psycholinguistic development found in SLA is somehow different than that found in FLL and that a different theory of psycholinguistics (and probably any other field of language study) is somehow necessary to account for FLL. Yet, there are two aspects of Higgs' comment that deserve attention. The first is that much of current FL reaction to SLA research and theory building is a reaction to Krashen's Monitor Theory (in particular his Input Hypothesis). It is not a reaction to SLA research in general and most FL professionals have had little to say about other models proposed to account for SLA, e.g. Schumann's Acculturation Hypothesis, Andersen's Nativization Model. The second important feature to note in Higgs' statement is that few empirical data have been collected on the psycholinguistic development of classroom language learners. If this is true, then the question is raised as to

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just what SLA researchers and FL researchers have been investigating and, if they have been pursuing different issues, why this is so.

As VanPatten (this volume) observes, historically, SLA research rose out of the investigation of the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL). As such, much of the research done on learners of ESL has taken place in the United States and not in countries where English would be considered a foreign language (the notable exceptions being some of the work in Germany and the Netherlands). Due to its traditional roots in English, to the traditional link between "applied" linguistics and linguistics "proper," and to the connection with child first language acquistion research paradigms, SLA research generally came forth from persons with extensive backgrounds in both linguistics and psycholinguistics. This has been compounded by the research in pidgins and other 'natural' second langaguges which also fall under the rubric of linguistic studies.

On the other hand, FLL has traditionally been associated with schools of education. It was assumed that anything dealing with the classroom learner, regardless of discipline, was the domain of educational research. What occurred over time, then, was a belief that the learning of languages in American high schools and universities was an "academic" problem to be investigated by specialists in education, while the learning of a second language was a "linguistic" problem to be investigated by linguists and psycholinguists. Within this context, research on FLL has been directed almost exclusively at the investigation of methodology. As VanPatten, Dvorak, and Lee (1987) point out,

> Underlying this emphasis on methodology has been the basic assumption that classroom language learning, like a clear plastic bag reveals the nature of the instruction that is poured into it but without shape or color of its own. What students learn and how well they learn was assumed to be primarily a result of how they were taught. (p. 1).

We should point out here that, beyond the confines of the U.S., concerns about the relationship between SLA research and theory and other fields of language study have been raised as well. Sridhar and Sridhar (1986), for example, have observed that SLA research/theory and research on indigenized varieties of English (IVEs) have tended to ignore each other, resulting in an "absence of dialogue." These authors note that SLA cannot be all encompassing if it ignores IVEs and that researchers in IVEs do not contribute empirically or theoretically to language acquisition studies. Kachru (1986) has also remarked on the limits of SLA research and theorizing. Using a non-Western perspective, she notes the absence of a non-Western context in building toward a theory: "Unless the data base of research in these areas is expanded, the claims to universality of research findings in second

language acquisition will remain suspect for most of the non-Western world" (p. 35).

While acknowledging the world context of foreign language learning, we believe that the time is ripe for second and foreign language specialists in the U.S. to begin critically examining the relationship between SLA and FLL. On April 3 and 4, 1987, a conference was held at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign which was dedicated to exploring this relationship and to bringing L2 and FL researchers together. Three general questions were posed to reflect the theme(s) of the conference:

(1) Do classroom language learners, without access to a second language speech community, necessarily follow different paths in the acquisition of linguistic structure compared to those who acquire a second language either naturalistically or in a natural environment where instruction is also used?

(2) Are SLA and FLL fundamentally different in terms of the process(es) used to internalize language?

(3) What is the relationship between SLA and FLL at the level of theory?

With these questions as guiding themes, 39 papers were presented from researchers in the U.S., Europe, Japan, and Australia. The papers treated a variety of topics including interlanguage theory and description, fossilization and accuracy, the social context of language learning, strategies, reading, application and evaluation.

The four papers that we have gathered here were presented at the Illinois SLA-FLL conference. Included are the two keynote addresses which address the relationship between SLA and FLL at the level of theory. The speakers, Roger Andersen and Sandra Savignon, were selected as each is a major figure in the fields of SLA and FLL, respectively. Another feature of the conference was a special panel discussion of four invited speakers in which two representatives of SLA and two of FLL were asked to address any of the following issues:

(1) How can the relationship between SLA and FLL be conceptualized?

(2) Where does SLA overlap with FLL? Where do they differ? What are the common concerns? What are the divergent concerns?

(3) What research needs to be undertaken to explore further the relationship between the two?

(4) What problems are there in applying SLA (or FLL

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for that matter) to foreign language education?

(5) Is classroom language learning the province of educational theory? Is there a theory of classroom language learning that is different from a general theory of classroom education?

(6) What are the parameters/limitations of classroom language learning? What can or does instruction impact on?

(7) Is FLL an independent field of research? Should we be working toward a separate theory of FLL? Is the classroom setting so unique that SLA research can not be applied to it?

Only two of the four panel presentations have been chosen for inclusion here, the papers by Kramsch and VanPatten. We believe that these more effectively lead into the papers by Savignon and Andersen such that the topics treated in these four papers can be placed along a continuum from FL education at one end to SLA theory at the other.

Kramsch asks the question, "What is FLL research?" In her paper she explores the links between SLA, FLL and FL education by illuminating different but similar concerns which permeate each. This exploration takes the form of an outline of five major aspects implicit in any serious investigation of the question posed by her title: the FLL setting, the object of FLL research and the methods employed to bring it about, and the concepts of language and language learning both explicit and implict in such research. In her conclusion she suggests a research agenda which "is hardly touched upon by current research in SLA and . . . has been neglected by FL pedagogy." Kramsch's final remark can be viewed as a challenge to teachers when she suggests that teachers should possess the knowledge to help them bring about changes in the educational system.

Following Kramsch is the paper by Savignon. In a sense, she picks up Kramsch's challenge and suggests to the FL professional how that challenge can be met by arguing that "in the end, nothing is more practical than a good theory." In her discussion, Savignon accounts for the FL profession's apparent impatience with theory and then goes on to discuss responsible theory building. She observes that the underlying "problem" for many teachers is that theory is not usually technique, that research offers implications for practice and not (necessarily) the practice itself. The route is circuitous, not direct. Implicit in this claim is that the product of teacher education is precisely education (as opposed to training) such that teachers then have the ability to (1) create curricula and techniques on their own in a principled fashion and (2) evaluate techniques and methods suggested to them by others.

VanPatten echoes Savignon's concern for responsible theory building by addressing the relationship between SLA and FLL vis a vis research and theory. Rejecting the position that SLA and FLL are only weakly connected, he also rejects what he perceives to be the present unidirectional relationship of producer of theory (SLA) and consumer of theory (FLL). He then examines an alternative bidirectional relationship in which both SLA and FLL researchers contribute to theory building. In this proposed relationship, VanPatten offers specific examples of how SLA theory is benefitted by research in the FL context and even suggests that "a theory of SLA is a product of research in different contexts of non-primary language acquisition rather than a precusor." He concludes his paper by suggesting several practical ways in which SLA and FL professionals can be brought together on a more regular basis.

Like VanPatten, Andersen suggests that at the level of theory building, there is an important and direct relationship between SLA and FLL. In his paper, he carefully details a cognitive-interactionist model of SLA based on principles, processes, and strategies of language learning. As he discusses this model, Andersen provides several concrete research projects for the FLL context which could contribute to the development of this model. He concludes his paper with a succinct statement about the relationship between SLA and FLL: "Nonclassroom-focussed SLA research stands to gain much from classroom-centered research and classroom-centered research can benefit considerably from the type of research carried on in settings outside of the classroom."

These four papers cannot be viewed as having answered the questions posed as to how SLA and FLL relate to each other. We hope, rather, that they are received as points of departure for further analysis and discussion of what must, from an outsider's viewpoint, look like similar fields. As such, we hope that they generate discussion among students and professors, among practitioners in ESL and FL, and among the very researchers themselves who are attempting to define and explain the complex phenomenon known as language acquisition.

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